

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Previously Presented) Method for handling a tubular knitted article comprising a first open end defining an elastic edge, a second open end surrounded by a band and which must be closed to form a closed toe of the article, along a closing line having specific orientation with respect to a pocket of fabric of the article; including the steps of:

- 5 - stretching said article over a tubular member so that an intermediate part of the band surrounding said second end is positioned along a line intersecting in two points the end edge of the tubular member and the remaining part is disposed along the outer side surface of the tubular member;
- detecting the angular position of said band on the tubular member; and
- 10 - identifying the position of the pocket of fabric on the basis of the angular position of said band with respect to the tubular member.

2. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, including the steps of:

- determining the angular positions of two portions of said band adjacent to the end edge of the tubular member and disposed on the outer side surface of said tubular member; and
- 5 - identifying the angular position of the pocket of fabric in the intermediate area between said two angular positions.

3. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 2, wherein said tubular member

is made to rotate about the axis thereof and the angular positions of said two portions of the band are determined during said rotation.

4. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said tubular member has a circular section and in that said intermediate portion of the band surrounding the second end of the article is disposed along a chord of the circumference defined by the end edge of the tubular member.

5. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 2, wherein said tubular member has a circular section and in that said intermediate portion of the band surrounding the second end of the article is disposed along a chord of the circumference defined by the end edge of the tubular member.

6. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 3, wherein said tubular member has a circular section and in that said intermediate portion of the band surrounding the second end of the article is disposed along a chord of the circumference defined by the end edge of the tubular member.

7. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the position of said band is detected by means of an optical detection system.

8. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tubular member is disposed in an angular position defined as a function of the position of the pocket of fabric, the tubular article being picked up by the tubular member when said tubular member has reached said specific angular position.

9. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, including the steps of:

- arranging at least a first sensor at a first distance from the end edge of the tubular member;
- rotating said tubular member and said first sensor with respect to each other about the axis of the tubular member with the tubular article inserted over the tubular member, until two portions of said band pass in front of said first sensor, determining the angular positions of said two portions on the tubular member;
- identifying the angular position of the pocket of fabric in the intermediate angular position between the two angular positions of said two portions of said band.

10. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 9, including the steps of: arranging a second sensor at a second distance from the end edge of the tubular member; and discerning between two possible diametrically opposed angular positions of said pocket of fabric using the combined detection of said two sensors.

11. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said band surrounding the opening of the second end of the article is of a different color to the color of the fabric adjacent to said band.

12. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the beginning and end of the fabric surrounding the tubular member is detected at the terminal end of said tubular member.

13. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the angular position of said band is detected by means of at least one distance sensor.

14. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the angular position of said band is detected by means of at least one electrical contact cooperating with said tubular member.

15. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a plurality of sensors are disposed around the axis of said tubular member, in proximity to said end edge of the tubular member, and in that said sensors and said tubular member are rotated reciprocally about the axis of the tubular member, to determine the angular position of the band of the article of the tubular member.

16. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 15, including the steps of:

- activating said sensors;
- identifying the sensors closest to the band of the article and facing an area of the tubular member covered by the fabric of the article;
- using at least one of said sensors closest to the band of the article, to determine the angular position of the band on the tubular member with a movement of reciprocal rotation between the tubular member and said sensors about the axis of the tubular member.

17. (Previously Presented) Method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tubular member is rotated together with the article to take said pocket of fabric to a predetermined angular position and in that the tubular member is rotated with respect to the article to take said tubular member to a predetermined angular position, with the pocket in a predetermined position with respect to the tubular member.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Previously Presented) A device for angular orientation of tubular knitted articles, comprising: a tubular member; means to insert and stretch a tubular knitted article over the outside of said tubular member; a control unit; including: at least one sensor positionable to the side of said tubular member in proximity to an end edge and capable of recognizing the fabric

5 of the tubular article; an actuator to reciprocally rotate the tubular member and said at least one sensor about the axis of the tubular member; said control unit being programmed to determine the angular position of the tubular article on the basis of the signal of said sensor.

20. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, wherein said at least one sensor is an optical sensor.

21. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, wherein said at least one sensor is a distance sensor.

22. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, wherein said at least one sensor comprises an electrical contact cooperating with the tubular member, said tubular member being produced in electrically conductive material, said tubular member and said sensor being disposed in an electric circuit, the contact between the sensor and the tubular member closing said electric circuit to produce a signal.

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23. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, including a plurality of sensors positionable about the axis of the tubular member.

24. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 20, including a plurality of sensors positionable about the axis of the tubular member.

25. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 21, including a plurality of sensors positionable about the axis of the tubular member.

26. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 22, including a plurality of sensors positionable about the axis of the tubular member.

27. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, wherein said sensors are disposed on a plane essentially orthogonal to the axis of the tubular member.

28. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, wherein said control unit is programmed to perform the following steps:

- activate said sensors;
- identify the two sensors closest to the band of the article inserted over the tubular member and disposed in positions in which the tubular member is covered by the fabric of the article;
- use at least one of said two sensors to identify the angular position of the tubular article.

29. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, including an element to clamp the band surrounding the toe of the article, to prevent said band from being positioned

entirely along the side surface of the tubular member before detection of the toe pocket.

30. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 17, wherein said at least one sensor is carried by a support coaxial to the tubular member, said support and said tubular member being rotatable with respect to each other, and in that disposed on said support is an engaging member of the tubular article, operable to engage the tubular article and cause rotation thereof with respect to the tubular member when the support and the tubular member rotate with respect to each other.

31. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 19, including an engaging member of the tubular article, to hold the tubular article in a predetermined position while the tubular member rotates therewithin, or to rotate the tubular article about the tubular member, holding the latter still.

32. (Previously Presented) Device as claimed in claim 31, including at least two stations, said sensor(s) being disposed in a first station and said engaging member of the tubular article being disposed in a second station.

33. (New) A method for handling an article, the method comprising:
providing a tubular knitted article, said tubular knitted article including an edge defining a first open end and a band defining a second open edge for forming a closed toe of said article

5 along a closing line having a predetermined orientation with respect to a pocket of fabric of said article;

providing a tubular member having an outer side surface, said tubular member having a defined axis;

10 stretching said article over said tubular member such that a portion of said band of said article is positioned along a line intersecting an edge of said tubular member at two points, whereby another portion of said band of said article is disposed along said outer side surface of said tubular member;

arranging a plurality of sensors about said axis of said tubular member;

sensing angular position of said band with respect to said tubular member via said plurality of sensors;

15 identifying angular position of said pocket of fabric based on signals received from said plurality of sensors.

34. (New) A device for angularly orienting a tubular knitted article, the device comprising:

a tubular knitted article;

a tubular member having an outside surface and a defined axis;

5 a means for inserting and stretching said tubular knitted article over said outside surface of said tubular member;

a plurality of sensors, said plurality of sensors being arranged about said axis of said

tubular member, said sensors and said knitted article being movable with respect to one another,
said sensors generating signals based on position of said tubular knitted article;

10 a control unit associated with said plurality of sensors, said control unit determining
angular position of said tubular article based on said signals received from said sensors.